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THE  
FIRST MARINE BRIGADE  
(PROVISIONAL)

ICELAND  
1941 - 1942

JOHN L. ZIMMERMAN



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**The**  
**FIRST MARINE BRIGADE**  
**(Provisional)**



**ICELAND**  
**1941 - 1942**



*U.S. Marine Corps.*

**The**  
**FIRST MARINE BRIGADE**  
**(Provisional)**



**ICELAND**  
**1941 - 1942**

**John L. Zimmerman**

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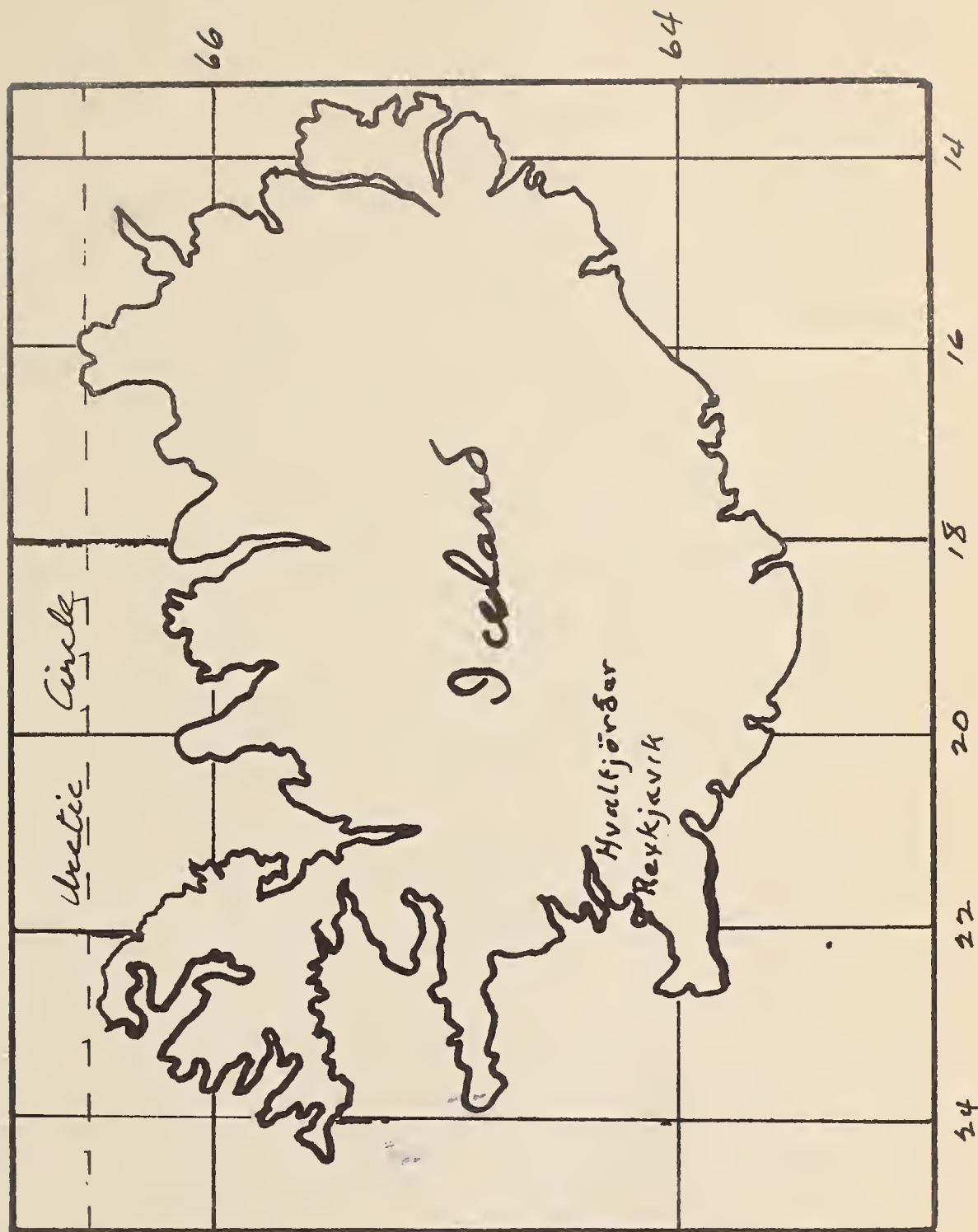
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THE first months of 1941 saw the Axis forces arrive at the peak of their conquests. Europe, with the exception of the three peninsular non-belligerents—Sweden, Spain, and Portugal—and of perennially neutral Switzerland, was either in active support of Germany and her satellites or was in a state of more or less complete enslavement. The Armies of Hitler and of Mussolini had expanded in every direction, and Great Britain, on the west, found herself facing a continent that was solidly against her, while Russia, on the east, was fighting for her life.

England's only hope of receiving those material aids to her indomitable fighting spirit lay in keeping open the sea lanes over which the heavily laden convoys from the United States, Canada, and the great Empire members of the South Pacific made their way to the homeland. Those convoys which made the trip from Australia and from New Zealand through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea were menaced by the aircraft and the submarines that infested the Mediterranean—and with the conquest of Greece and the fall of Crete, this menace was greatly increased. On the other hand, the groups which sailed from the United States or from Eastern Canada, while they were reasonably free from air attack, were harassed continually by submarines, those relentless marauders which, from their bases all along the European coastline, came forth singly or in packs to haunt the shipping routes and prey upon vitally important east bound ships.

Two routes lay open to Atlantic convoys, each of which had its advantages as well as its disadvantages. The southern route, for instance, offered smoother passage and relative freedom from the gales and the fogs of the more northern latitudes; the summer nights were longer and the hours of greatest danger consequently shorter. On the other hand, the trip was appreciably longer, and it was axiomatic that the longer the time spent at sea, the greater the chance of interception and destruction by the enemy.

The northern route, since it lay along the Great Circle from the eastern coast of North America, was a much shorter and, given decent weather, a much quicker trip. Because the route lay not too far from land on the east and on the west, it was possible to provide air as well as surface protection for the ships over a good part of the trip. For a part of the year the long nights gave additional protection, but the converse was of course true during the long days of the summer months. As has been said above, gales and fogs made the trip an arduous one, and there was always the disquieting possibility of surface raiders from the Norwegian fjords.

Immediately after the occupation of Denmark by Germany, early in April, 1940, Great Britain realized that the next obvious move by the enemy would be the taking over of Iceland, for the sake of the splendid naval facilities at Hvalfjordur. The possession of such a base, situated astride and almost touching the northern convoy routes, would, in effect, deny absolutely the use of those routes to Allied shipping. And the denial of those routes, and the consequent pressure upon the southern route, might well make the adequate supplying of England an impossibility.

Furthermore, possession of Iceland would afford the Germans ideal meteorological stations from which important weather data could be gained for use in the planning of air strikes against the British Isles. The importance of such information can be gained from the fact that subsequent to the denial of Iceland to them—if indeed it had not been done before—small weather stations were set up and operated in Greenland, by the Germans, at the cost of great difficulty of operation and much suffering on the part of the crews manning them.

Under the circumstances, there was but one course open to the British command, and it acted with determination and dispatch. Iceland was occupied by British troops on 9 May 1940\* and subsequently declared herself free of any dependence upon Denmark.†

\* It was said by the British in Iceland that evidence existed showing that the British forces beat the Germans to the country by a matter of days.

† It was over a year later (May 16, 1941) that the ties binding the two countries were actually severed. New York Times, 21 May 1941, Page 2.



British troops were scattered around the entire coast, with the heaviest concentrations in the neighborhood of Reykjavik and Hvalfjordur, and the fjordur itself was used as a base by many of the British Fleet units.\*

It is difficult to realize, in retrospect, the precarious position of England in the last days of the great air attacks upon her. Her armies had been outgeneraled and thoroughly defeated on the continent when the so-called Sitzkrieg in France ended with the explosive advance of the Nazi Army across that country and the neighboring Lowlands. Only the desperate and magnificent efforts of the Royal Air Force, the heroism of the owners and pilots of the nondescript navy of small craft that evacuated the disorganized remnants of her Army from Dunkirk, and the superb courage of that Army in its moment of defeat permitted her to save enough of her land forces to serve as a nucleus for a new Army.

At the moment, however, the gravity of her position was clear to everyone, apparently, save herself. It may indeed be that her sublime blindness to that one thing was the imponderable trifle that staved off her defeat, that her refusal to admit her hopeless condition did, in effect, enable her to carry on the fight. To others, and in particular to her friends, it seemed that her defeat was inevitable, and that only a miracle could avert it.

Under these circumstances, it was by no means strange that certain countries inimical to German domination but not as yet under its yoke should begin to look to the westward for support. There was no lack of friendship toward England in this, and no lack of loyalty to her. It was simply that all discernible signs pointed to the early collapse of her power to resist further attack by the enemy.

It was not surprising then that on December 18, 1940, Stefan Johan Stefansson, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland, approached Bertel E. Kuniholm, the American Consul at Reykjavik, with certain suggestions in the matter of the future defense of his country.

The conversation during which the suggestions were advanced was conducted informally, and Mr. Stefansson was careful to point out that he had no mandate from his government to voice them or to commit that government in any way. Some interesting points were brought out during the talk. It was evident from the Minister's remarks that the Government of Iceland took an extremely gloomy view of the possibility that England might be able to survive, for he said definitely that while he hoped, of course, that she would win, he was not optimistic. It was felt that in the event England was forced to capitulate and to carry on the fight from her overseas possessions, the English troops on duty in Iceland at the moment would be withdrawn at once, and that the country would thereupon be left without defense. Mr. Stefansson suggested that Iceland be incorporated in the "Monroe Doctrine Area."

This state of mind, it seems, was no new thing in Iceland, for there is some evidence that prior to the British occupation, Mr. Thor Thors had spoken *in camera* to the Althing, the Icelandic Parliament, recommending that an appeal for help be made to the United States. This proposal was rejected by that body on the ground that there was no reason to believe that the neutrality of the country would be infringed upon by either belligerent.

That was at least a suspicion, also, that some kind of an agreement existed secretly between Great Britain and the United States regarding the defense of Iceland, for Mr. Stefansson said openly that he believed in its existence. Some support is given this suspicion by the fact that shortly before the date of the subject conversation, one Mr. Wedgewood, MP, had asked in Parliament whether or not any plans had been made to turn over the defense of Iceland to the United States. The question was unanswered.

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\* It is interesting to note that immediately after Iceland suspended exercise of power of the King of Denmark, 10 April 1940, she was asked by the United States to enter into direct relations with us.



COLONEL (now Brig. Gen.) L. D. HERMLE, C. O. 6th Marines.





The gist of the conversation was sent at once to Washington for comment, and the Secretary of State, with characteristic caution, replied that the United States wished to make no commitments and that Mr. Kuniholm should neither encourage nor discourage an approach to this government.\*

It is now clear that some time between January 18th and June 24th, a considerable amount of negotiation took place, for when, on July 7th, the President of the United States notified Congress of a **fait accompli**, the landing of United States Marines in Iceland, he made reference to a letter from the Icelandic Prime Minister, dated June 24th. In this letter, the Icelandic statesman said, in part, "He (the British Minister) also called my attention to the declaration of the President of the United States to the effect that he must take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of the Western Hemisphere... One of the President's measures is to assist in the defense of Iceland... and that the President is therefore prepared to send here immediately United States troops."†

Whatever the negotiations may have been, the fact is that the United States, although technically at peace, was committed to move a war strength Brigade into the active zone of the European war for the express purpose of resisting any attempt on the part of one of the belligerents to occupy the strategic island.‡

The movement may be said to have begun when the Sixth Marine Regiment, Reinforced, (Colonel Leo D. Hermle) embarked at San Diego on three transports and two destroyers and cleared the harbor at dusk on May 31, 1941. There is still some doubt as to whether the actual destination of that unit was Iceland, for a persistent and widespread rumor mentioned the troublesome French island of Martinique as a possible objective, and there was much to support that rumor. For Martinique had been a sore spot for several months. Its government was apparently whole-heartedly collaborating with the German masters of France, and there was considerable suspicion that information was being given out from it to the submarine packs that were operating in the Caribbean. The **Emile Bertin**, a light cruiser, and the **Bearn**, an aircraft carrier, had recently returned from maneuvers in the vicinity of the island, and were in port.§

It was no secret that the attitude of the Naval Governor of the island was an annoyance to the United States, and matters were by no means made better by the issuing of a declaration\*\* to the people of the island to "resist invasion by the United States." In view of the attitude of the government of the United States and of the intransigent spirit of the government of the island, a move toward it would have occasioned no surprise.

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\* This message was sent Mr. Kuniholm at 3:00 P. M., January 18, 1941. In the meanwhile, President Roosevelt had made the first tentative motions toward aid to Britain on December 17th and January 6th, and he also had declared against the sending abroad of an Expeditionary Force (December 29th).

† Message to Congress, July 7, 1941. Department of State Bulletin No. 107, Volume V.

‡ Germany had declared Iceland to lie in the War Zone some time prior to May 21, 1941. N. Y. Times, 21 May 1941, Page 2.

NOTE: The attitude of the United States was one of constantly increasing pressure upon Germany. In the middle of July, the United States forces were told that, "Approach of any forces within fifty miles of Iceland will be deemed conclusive evidence of hostile intent and will justify attack on such Axis forces by the armed forces of the United States." By September 30th, national attitude had so changed that the following directive was issued: "The presence of German or Italian naval, land, or air forces (in the Western Atlantic Area) will be deemed conclusive evidence of hostile intent and will require attack on such forces unless the attack under the then existing circumstances would be tactically unsound." The Western Atlantic Area was defined as that area lying west of the following line: The meridian of 10W longitude south to the 65th N parallel, thence by rhumb line to the junction of 53N and 26W, thence south along the 26th meridian W.

§ The port of Fort de France was the point of origin of a peculiarly annoying pamphlet devoted to pro-German propaganda, an affair of some thirty pages that was issued weekly and distributed from that city. N. Y. Times, 23 May 1941, Page 5.

\*\* Immediately branded by Secretary of State Cordell Hull as German propaganda. Ibid.

NOTE: General Marston agrees that all signs pointed toward the employment of the force in "occupying one of the islands of the West Indies which, at that time, was causing considerable concern in Washington over the attitude of its Naval Governor." Letter, General Marston to JLZ, 1 June 1945.



It may have been that an occupation of the island was actually contemplated at the time. If such was the case, there was a sudden change in plans, for after having passed through the canal in three darkened transports, the regiment turned to the northward and docked at Charleston, South Carolina on June 17th.

The early days of June had seen a considerable amount of activity on the part of the United States Marine Corps. On June 6th, the First Corps, Atlantic Fleet, was formed and placed under the command of Major General Holland M. Smith. It was composed of the First Marine Division, Army Air Force Afirm, First Marine Aircraft Group, and Base Depot (Forward Echelon). On June 16th, in accordance with verbal approval given by CINCLANT on June 10th, the First Marine Brigade (Provisional) was formed\* and placed under the command of Brigadier General John Marston. It was composed of the following units:

- Brigade Hq. Platoon
- Company A, 2nd Tank Battalion (less one platoon)
- Company C, 1st Engineer Battalion
- 3rd Platoon, 1st Scout Company
- Chemical Platoon
- Company A, 2nd Medical Battalion
- 1st Platoon, Company A, 2nd Service Battalion
- Two Bakery Units
- Band
- 6th Marines
- 2nd Battalion, 10th Marines
- 5th Defense Battalion (less 5" Artillery Group)

With the exception of passing mention made in a few early documents, nothing was heard of the I Corps in connection with the Iceland episode. It never exercised any control over the activities of the Brigade, the latter being under the direct control of the Commandant.

The organization of both groups was accomplished with a maximum of secrecy, and the movement of men from various parts of the East Coast to the port of Charleston was likewise carried out quietly. No undue activity accompanied the embarkation and the sortie of the transports and the supply ships when they left port on June 22nd.

A total of 4,095† men, with supplies for ninety days and ten units of fire, embarked on the three transports which had brought the Sixth from the West Coast. A fourth transport, the ORIZABA, was added at Charleston and served as headquarters for the Brigade staff, which consisted of the following officers under General Marston:

- Colonel Charles I. Murray, Chief of Staff
- Major Joseph S. Hankins, Adjutant
- Major Walter E. Churchill, Intelligence
- Major Edwin C. Ferguson, Operations
- Captain George A. Brockway, Supply

The mission of the force was to defend Iceland against attack, in cooperation with the British troops situated there.‡ The latter, a total of about 25,000 men, were placed in scattered groups around the entire coastline of the country, with the majority of them in the vicinity of Reykjavik and at Akureyri in the north.

The peculiar topography of Iceland made the problem of its defense a difficult one. The rugged terrain of the interior makes travel by water or by coastal roads almost man-

\* Corps General Order No. 4-41, dated at Quantico, 14 June 1941.

† I Marine Brigade Intelligence Log. Entry of 17 June 1941, page 1.

‡ Memorandum from Chief of Naval Operations to Commanding General, First Marine Brigade (Provisional) dated June 16, 1941: "TASK: IN COOPERATION WITH THE BRITISH GARRISON, DEFEND ICELAND AGAINST HOSTILE ATTACK" (sic).



**BRIGADIER GENERAL (now Maj. Gen.) JOHN MARSTON**  
**C. O. First Marine Brigade (Provisional)**





datory—air travel is hazardous because of uncertain meteorological conditions—and communication between widely separated points is difficult always and impossible, in some cases, during the winter. Any attempt to move forces, except for short distances, from one locality to another for the purpose of dealing with a threatened attack was out of the question, and for that reason, the only method of defense that gave promise of being successful was that of having small forces so disposed as to be able immediately to engage an enemy force at whatever point it chose to land.

On June 23rd, the small convoy, consisting of four transports, two cargo ships, and two destroyers, was met by an imposing force of warships, and on the next day still more combat craft joined the group. When the entire convoy assembled and began its movement toward the north, it consisted of twenty-three vessels, including two battleships.\*

Immediately upon taking to sea, the Marines aboard the four transports were given the responsibility of establishing and maintaining air and surface watches. Marine personnel was used for boat deck and crow's nest watches on a twenty-four hour basis,† and it was a Marine lookout who, in the evening of July 5, 1941, sighted a lifeboat adrift in the convoy area. The people aboard the small craft had come from a ship which had been torpedoed after having had to fall behind its convoy, and they consisted of four American Red Cross women workers and ten Norse sailors. No enemy activity was seen during the trip, although there were numerous reports of submarine contacts from the destroyers which screened the convoy.

The voyage to Reykjavik was broken by a short stop at Argentia, Newfoundland, where the convoy lay up for two days. Some of the troops were given an opportunity to get ashore for badly needed exercise, but the majority stayed aboard ship in the desolate little bay. Prior to making landfall at Newfoundland, a good bit of speculation was still rife as to the destination of the Brigade, and the officers of the Sixth Regiment were quite busy about brushing up on their information regarding Newfoundland, for there seemed to be a faint possibility that the Brigade was to be employed as a defending force for the large military installations which were in the process of being completed at that time.

The convoy departed the bay after nightfall of July 1st and late in the morning of July 7th the troops got their first glimpse of the strange rocky land that was to be their base for the next eight months when the high round snow-covered dome of Snaefellsjokull loomed up far off to port. Anchors were dropped in the bay outside the small protected harbor late in the afternoon. Visits were immediately exchanged between the newly arrived Americans and their new partners in defense, the British; American Consular officials and Icelandic government personnel likewise visited the ORIZABA, where the General had his command post.

Docking facilities at Reykjavik were severely limited. While they had been adequate to take care of all shipping in normal peace time, the added load imposed upon them by the necessity for supplying some 25,000 men in addition to the normal population found them far short of sufficient. The docks were small and there was a severe limitation as to draft

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\* Entire convoy was composed of:

Transports: BIDDLE, HEYWOOD, ORIZABA, FULLER  
Battleships: NEW YORK, ARKANSAS  
Cruisers: NASHVILLE, BROOKLYN  
Destroyers: LANSDALE, MADISON, PLUNKETT, NIBLACK, BENSON, GLEAVES, GEORGE E.  
NADGER, HILARY P. JONES, CHARLES F. HUGHES, MAYO  
Cargo: ARCTURUS, HAMUL

In addition to the above were the tanker SALAMONIE, the sea going tug CHEROKEE, and the VP52.

† In spite of the inclemency of the weather, on one ship at least, the naval personnel refused to issue weather clothing to the Marines who were standing watch. The latter were forced to perform this duty in regulation green uniforms during heavy fog, driving rain, and high wind.

and length of ships to be unloaded. A tide that varied between 12 and 16 feet did nothing to help the situation, and rough weather such as was to be expected at any time of the year made unloading by lighter a precarious alternative to unloading at the docks.\*

The long day of the northern latitudes proved to be of great assistance in the task of taking ashore approximately 1,500 tons of supplies from the three transports occupied by the Sixth Marines. While there was not twenty-four hours of actual sunlight, a bright twilight prevailed during the short period that the sun spent below the horizon, and it was never necessary to use lights to assist the men at work. About four hundred men, working in continuous shifts, succeeded in emptying the hold of the three vessels in four days. Lighters, Higgins Boats, small nondescript local motor boats and launches were used to run the supplies to the beach and to the docks, whence they were moved by British trucks to dumps and camps.

The Marine Corps personnel was split into various groups and billeted in camps that had been abandoned by the British for the purpose of making room for the Americans. Brigade Headquarters was established at Camp Lumley, near Alafoss, a small town twelve miles northeast of Reykjavik, in the direction of Thingvellir. The remainder of the command was distributed in ten camps.

The distribution of the American Forces was dictated partly by expedience and partly by the nature of the mission. Properly centralized living and working space was not available in the city, and the headquarters of the Brigade of necessity lived and operated near Alafoss, far out from the city and equally far from the Naval Base at Hvalfjordur. The Fifth Defense Battalion, however, was encamped near the city of Reykjavik, for its mission was to provide antiaircraft defense for the airfield, near in the center of the city, and for the harbor.

There is every reason to suppose that the Brigade considered that its mission was a temporary one only, and that it expected to be relieved early in the fall at the latest. There is some evidence that it may have been planned to withdraw the Marines from the island sometime in September for hints to that effect appear in correspondence† of the latter part of August.

Tactically, the Brigade was under the command of the British General Officer Commanding, and its mission was two-fold. The Sixth Marines, disposed in various camps between Reykjavik and Hvalfjordur, was designated a mobile column, and it was to be used at any point along the road leading from the city to the naval base. The Fifth Defense Battalion, on the other hand, was employed as an antiaircraft unit, and its mission was the defense of the city and the harbor and the airport against air attack.

The exigencies of war were such that it was impossible for the Brigade to take full advantage either of the terrain—ideal for training—or of its proximity to the veteran British. The advent of winter made it imperative that suitable living quarters be constructed not only for the Marines but also for the Army units already en route from the United States. Such construction could not be undertaken by the Icelanders. The number of men available from the native population was far too small to permit of the withdrawal from the labor pool of anything like sufficient numbers for the work, especially since many of them were already engaged in the construction of the local airfield, a matter of top priority.

The matter of the construction of the camps was made easier than normally would have been the case because of the availability of the ubiquitous Nissen Hut. This unit, perfected by the British and manufactured by them, was a wooden decked and metal

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\* The condition was made all the more serious by the fact that with the exception of fish and a little mutton, no supplies of any kind for the occupying military forces could be acquired locally. Everything had to be brought in from the outside and of necessity had to pass through the inadequate port facilities.

† Letters, John Marston to T. Holcomb.



NEW RIVER AVE.



NISSEN hut, showing way in which earth bank was used to anchor and weatherproof them.



Looking northeast toward ESJA highlands.



roofed affair resembling in outward appearance the quonset hut that was used later by the American Army and Navy. The ends of each hut were made in three wooden sections, so constructed that they could be assembled in a few minutes. The deck consisted of wooden panels resting upon a frame of two by four timber, while the roof and sides were made of corrugated metal of about sixteen gauge. Two layers of metal were used on the lower reaches of the wall, a single layer above, and the whole was supported by curved I-beam steel ribs. With each hut there was issued a complete kit of tools and hardware for its assembling, and the only actual fashioning that had to be done on the site was the constructing of supporting piles, which were usually made of concrete.

A crew of six men, after becoming familiar with the method, could erect a hut in one day, and the hut so built was capable of housing sixteen men, with ample room for personal gear. The flimsy construction of the end assemblies made it necessary for the men who occupied a hut to improvise a method for making it water and wind proof, and this was accomplished by flattening the tin containers of gasoline, five gallon size, and sheathing the outside of the end walls. Further comfort was made possible by banking earth along the sides to a depth of four feet which also served to anchor the huts, and a hut so prepared could be well heated by a single "pot-bellied" cast iron stove. The smaller sheet iron cylindrical stoves, lined with fire clay, that were used by the British were found to be unsatisfactory.

The land upon which the camps were constructed ranged from rich peat bog to barren lava fields and to clay and gravel wasteland. Halogoland Camp, which had been lent the Third Battalion Sixth for a temporary billet by a British Signal Company lay in the midst of excellent pasture land within two miles of Reykjavik on the main highway, across which, and not over a thousand yards away, another and much larger encampment was under construction, also on some of the best meadow land of the vicinity. The same battalion moved in September to a rocky knoll in the midst of wet swampland at the entrance of Hvalfjordur, into a camp that was entirely inadequate in size and facilities. Huts were built hastily to provide basic comfort, but it was not until early in January that bathing facilities were completed, water for which was piped three miles across the swamp from a series of springs on the slopes of Esja cliffs—an engineering feat made the more difficult by occasional periods of freezing weather.

The situation as regarded food was deplorable during the Autumn months of 1941. For some reason it was apparently impossible to bring fresh meat or vegetables to the American Forces, and for two months the entire diet of the men consisted of dehydrated vegetables, dried milk, and canned meat of the spam and corned beef class. Small amounts of fish and malodorous local mutton did little to alleviate the situation. Candy from the various Post Exchanges was consumed in unbelievable amounts, as was the canned soup that occasionally made its way to the shelves. It is probably that the low point in morale was reached toward the end of that period, and the situation affected officers as well as men, for the allowance for the one group was the same as that for the other. It was announced early in November that the dehydrated food program had been an experiment.

Recreational facilities were extremely limited in the city, even for the local population. Restaurants were small, and although they made every effort to adjust themselves to the added burden placed upon them by the advent of the Americans, their size and numbers made it impossible for them to accommodate all comers. The two moving picture theaters were barely large enough to take care of local demand and entirely too small to accommodate more than a small fraction of the Marines.

The Hotel Borg, the largest and best of its kind in the country, was in a similar condition. It served the inhabitants of Reykjavik as a center of social life, and while it made every effort possible to take care of the demands of the officers of the Brigade, the accommodations which it had to offer were by no means adequate to the demands.

During the early days of the occupation, the canteens of the British camps were open to the Marines, as well as the British operated Y. M. C. A. huts and the Navy Army Air Force Institute store—popularly known as the NAAFI Store. Throughout the entire period of Marines' stay there continued to be a high degree of good feeling shown between the services of the two countries, with men visiting back and forth between the camps and sharing food and supplies with one another.

Some amelioration was felt when moving picture equipment was installed in the various camps, and when beer began to be available in adequate amounts in the Post Exchanges. Reading matter was never plentiful enough, and in the long run the men were thrown upon their own devices for recreation. A tentative curriculum of study and instruction was set up and received an enthusiastic response, but the Pearl Harbor episode occurred as the program was about to get under way, and the project was, of necessity, put aside.

The first mission of the Brigade was to defend Iceland against attack, in cooperation with the British force of some 25,000 men which was already on the island. The wording of the basic order assigning the mission implied that the ties of command were to be tenuous and that the details of the cooperation were to be worked out by the staff of the Brigade and the British command.\* Actually, there was the closest of connection between the two forces, and it was plain from the beginning that the Commander of the British force understood that the Brigade was, in effect, a token force to be used as a supplement to his own troops. In all matters of administration, discipline, and so on, however, the Marines were independent and continued to be so until the advent of the army and the assumption of command of the Iceland Base Command by Major General Bonesteel.

On August 12, 1941, representatives of the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and CINCLANT met to discuss the matter of the defense of the island, and at that time the question of the movement of some 5,000 Army troops to Iceland was brought up. It was also decided then to retain the First Marine Brigade in its present station.†

On 16 August occurred an event that served to bring to the Brigade as a whole the idea that it, as well as the United States, was in reality operating in close cooperation with the British, for on that morning at 1030, the 6th Regiment was paraded on the paved highway running from Reykjavik to the northeast. An inspection was announced, but it was not until the actual party arrived that the Brigade as a whole knew that the central figure was to be Winston Churchill. He and his companions walked the entire length of the regiment and the British Forces, and then reviewed them. Five days previously he had met with the President of the United States, and at that meeting, which took place aboard a warship in the Atlantic, the epochmaking verbal Atlantic Charter was agreed upon.

The first Army contingent to arrive in Iceland was a small group of Army Air Force personnel that arrived in the early part of August‡ and immediately went into quarters near the airfield. It was not until well over a month later that the larger groups began to arrive, and with their arrival life began to become complicated for General Marston and for the men of his command.

On September 22, 1941, President Roosevelt signed an order directing that General Marston report with his command for duty under Major General Bonesteel, who had been designated the Commanding General, Iceland Base Command. On September 27, General Marston reported by dispatch his compliance with those orders on September 24th, the effective date of the transfer of command.

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\* Indigo-3: Paragraph 26. Coordination of operations for the defense of Iceland—will be by the method of mutual cooperation.

† MEMORANDUM. Director, Plans and Policies, to the Major General Commandant, 14 August 1941.

‡ Oral orders had been given on 5 July by President Roosevelt to Chief of Staff and Chief of Naval Operations.



Considerable misgiving had been felt when it became known to the Marine Corps as a whole that the Brigade was to become, to all intents and purposes, a part of the Army for its entire tour of duty in Iceland.\* It was felt that an unusually ambiguous position would be occupied by the Marine forces because of the radically different systems employed by the two services, more particularly those systems dealing with administration and discipline, and some correspondence on the subject took place. The anticipated difficulties did not materialize to the expected extent, however, and with the single exception of a great increase in the amount of paper work, no untoward effects were experienced by the Marines.

While no major inconvenience was suffered because of the change of command, minor annoyances existed, and one instance of that type may be mentioned. During their entire stay in Iceland, the Marines had been living under something that approached field conditions—the huts were weather-proof but by no means luxurious, bathing facilities were not adequate, food had never been entirely satisfactory. Bunks were the ordinary folding canvas field cots, each equipped with a narrow, thin pad in lieu of a mattress, and the only bedclothes available were the regulation issue blankets. No pillows, sheets, or pillowslips were available, and since during the dry months a great deal of abrasive lava dust had found its way into the blankets, to be sealed in during the wet season by the concrete-like mud of the country, and since, moreover, laundry facilities were of the most primitive, by the time the Third Battalion was ready to leave its camp at Arnholt, the bunks were in what might be called unsatisfactory and uncomfortable condition.

On the last day in the camp, the Commanding Officer of Third Battalion, received word that he must leave behind a small working party, whose duty it would be to place new, full-sized mattresses on the bunks and then make them with fresh sheets, pillows, and pillowslips (all supplied by the Army) so that the Army personnel who were to take over the camp would be able to move in with no fears for their own comfort. With considerable regret the colonel issued the necessary orders.

Sometime in November it was decided to withdraw the Brigade. The Fifth Defense Battalion was already being considered for duty elsewhere, and a large number of Army personnel was scheduled to arrive early in the year. It was decided to use the transports that brought them for the transfer of the Marines to the States.

It may be assumed that this news was not unwelcome to the majority of the Marines, and it may also be assumed that not only the prospect of going home made it so. In the early days of the war there was still a heavy sprinkling in the ranks of old time enlisted men, most of whom had seen duty in the Orient and in the tropical regions of the Western Hemisphere. There was at the time a strong feeling of personal identity with the entire corps on the part of the men in the ranks, a feeling that arose from a personal knowledge and acquaintanceship on the part of the older men and from a vicarious knowledge on the part of the younger ones. Hand in hand with this feeling of identity went a similar feeling toward the Orient and the Pacific. To the older Marine, the regions to the West of the United States were familiar and well-liked territory, and he regarded them with a feeling of affection that Europe and the Atlantic—strange and outlandish places—could never arouse.

It was early in the evening of a cold and blustery day that the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor came in over the radio, and after the first shock had worn off, there was a feeling of general relief. The queer and anomalous position of the country as a whole and of the Icelandic force in particular was at an end; no longer would the force have to regard itself as a band of interlopers. War was upon it, a Pacific war.

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\* On August 14th, the Brigade had been informed by dispatch that its stay on the island would be "indefinite", and all rumors of an early departure for other climes died peacefully on that date.

The vague, heroic tale of Wake Island was followed as it unfolded, and as each day brought news that the resistance was continuing the feeling of kinship grew. Friends were recalled, friends now in action, and a vague envy of them grew up, and a desire to be with them.

On January 31st, 1942, the Third Battalion, Sixth, sailed from Reykjavik, landing in New York on the day that the *Normandie* burned at her dock. The remaining units followed at irregular intervals and by March 25th the entire Brigade, with the exception of a few men who had volunteered to remain for duty with the small Marine Detachment at Hvalfjordur, had returned to the United States.

Immediately upon their arrival in the United States, the men of the Brigade were given furloughs—those who lived east of the Mississippi were permitted to leave direct from New York while those from the West accompanied their units across country. The Sixth Marines, together with other units of the Second Division—Second Battalion Tenth, and elements of the Second Tank Battalion, the Second Medical Battalion, and the Second Service Battalion, reported back to their division. The Fifth Defense, already slated for another move overseas, was sent to Parris Island, while elements of the First Division—C Company, First Engineer Battalion, Third Platoon, First Scout Company, and Bakery Units—went back to the Marine Barracks at New River. Brigade Headquarters and the Brigade Band reported to Quantico.



## Staffs of the Brigade and its Units

July, 1941

### Brigade

Brigadier General John Marston	Commanding Officer
Colonel Charles I. Murray	Brigade Executive
Major Walter A. Churchill	B-2
Major Edwin C. Ferguson	B-3
Captain George H. Brockway	B-4
Captain Robert E. Hill	Adjutant and B-1

### Sixth Marines

Colonel Leo D. Hermle	Commanding Officer
Lieutenant Colonel William McN. Marshall	Regimental Executive
Major David M. Shoup	R-3
Captain Arnold F. Johnston	R-1
Captain William J. Wise	R-2
Major Ralph D. Leach	R-4

### First Battalion, Sixth

Lieutenant Colonel Oliver P. Smith	Commanding Officer
Major C. H. Baldwin	Battalion Executive and Bn-3
1st Lieutenant R. W. Rickert	Bn-1
1st Lieutenant R. E. Haffner	Bn-2
1st Lieutenant C. B. Rogers, III	Bn-4

### Second Battalion, Sixth

Lieutenant Colonel William A. Worton	Commanding Officer
Major J. F. Hankins	Battalion Executive
Captain T. J. Colley	Bn-3
1st Lieutenant R. McC. Tompkins	Bn-1
1st Lieutenant William W. Young, Jr.	Bn-4
2d Lieutenant William C. Chamberlin	Bn-2

### Third Battalion, Sixth

Lieutenant Colonel M. G. Holmes	Commanding Officer
Major C. B. Graham	Battalion Executive
Captain R. J. Kennedy	Bn-3
1st Lieutenant H. C. Boehm	Bn-2
2d Lieutenant C. C. Sheehan	Bn-4

### Fifth Defense Battalion

Colonel L. L. Leech	Commanding Officer
Lieutenant Colonel C. V. Muldrow	Battalion Executive
Major G. F. Good, Jr.	Bn-3
Captain H. S. Leon	Bn-2
Captain C. W. Shelburne	Bn-4

Other reinforcing units attached to the Brigade were commanded as follows:

### Second Battalion, Tenth

Lieutenant Colonel J. B. Wilson	Commanding Officer
Major A. V. Gerard	Battalion Executive
Captain H. A. Traffert, Jr.	Bn-4
1st Lieutenant T. S. Ivey	Bn-3
1st Lieutenant M. Fenton	Bn-2

### Details from the following were commanded by

First Scout Company	Captain R. M. Fawell, Jr.
First Engineering Bn.	1st Lieutenant L. W. Smith, Jr.
Second Medical	Lieutenant Commander R. E. Fielding
Second Service Bn.	2d Lieutenant A. F. Torgler, Jr.
Second Tank	Captain J. G. Cook, Jr.

## CONTENTS OF HISTORICAL DIVISION FILES

**1stProvMarBrig Report of Activities**, dated 26Mar42. Reports submitted by General Marston to the Commandant in the form of a detailed skeleton narrative of nineteen pages.

**1stBrig Movement to Iceland**. Thirty-six separate documents consisting of miscellaneous reports and orders indexed and tabbed for convenience.

**Tables of Organization and Station Lists**. Six documents with an index.

**Requests for Personnel**. Nine documents with an index.

**Requests for Equipment**. Twenty-seven documents with an index; all types of equipment.

**Communications**. Fifteen documents of interesting reading, with an index.

**Transfer of Supplies to Army**. Twelve documents with an index.

**Return from Iceland**. Eight documents dealing with disposition of units on return, with an index.

**B-3 Reports**. Eight reports, brief accounts of state of Brigade.

**6thRegt Report of Activities**. Three reports covering period from 25 May to 30 Nov. Interesting factual narrative.

**5th DefBn Report of Activities**. Four reports covering period from 7Jun41 to 29Feb42. Interesting factual narrative.

**Indigo-1**. Directive for a Pursuit Squadron in Iceland.

**Relief of MC in Iceland**.

**Joint Directive. U. S. Troops in Iceland**. Indigo-3. JBNo.325 (Serial 687-3). Two documents dated 15Aug41; second document is a Navy supplement.

**Joint Directive. Defense of Iceland**. Basic Directive for defense of Iceland and Greenland. This was known as NOAH Plan.

**Naval Activity Reports**. Three documents with an index.

**Miscellaneous Reports**. Eight documents with an index.

B-4 Report 9/1-9/30

B-2 Report 9/1-9/30

Monthly Report, Com. Diseases, Sep41

Navy Department Comments on matter relating to occupation. 130ct41

Passive Defense for Navy Shore Activities

Report, Iceland Force Tactical School

Report, British Force Tactical School

Report, British Artillery

**1stMarBrig Orders**. Twenty-one items with an index.

**HQ Iceland Force Orders**. Seven items with an index.

**Misc. Orders**. Five items with an index; includes order from I Corps re organization of the Brigade.

**1stMarBrig B-2 Log**. Interesting chronology of the occupation from Brigade viewpoint.

**Estimate of Situation**. Two documents with an index.

**Report of Recon.**, 1-13Jun41.

**Base Facilities, Reykjavik**. Five items with an index. Attention is directed to Item E, pp8-9 and to the discussion of censorship on pl Annex A to that item.

**Misc. Messages**. Ten items with an index.

**Miscellaneous**. Twenty-four items with an index. Most interesting and enlightening folder in the group.

**General Marston's Letters**. Eleven letters, personal, to General Holcomb and others, which explain certain events and information.

**Correspondence re Naval Hosp**. Seven items with an index.

**Photographs**.

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